

THE PERPETUITY
OF
THE REIGN OF CHRIST.

THE LAST SERMON PREACHED BY
LATE REV. ALEXANDER TOPP, D.D.

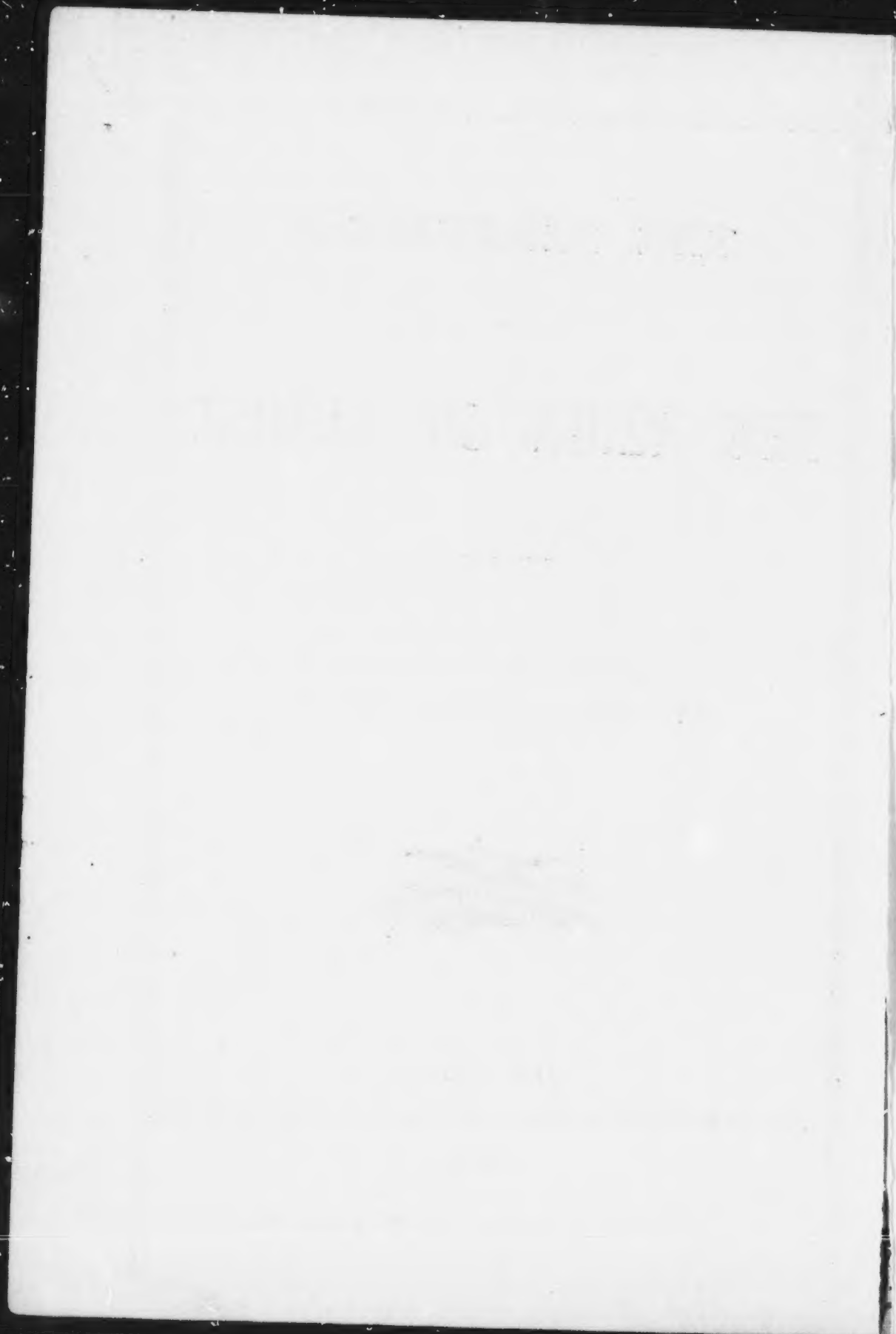


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“ His name shall endure forever ; His name shall be continued as long as the sun ; and men shall be blessed in Him ; all nations shall call Him blessed.”—Psalms lxxii. 17.

THIS lofty, animated production, is entitled “A Psalm for Solomon.” There can be little doubt from the whole tenour of the Psalm, and the mould in which it has been cast, that, whatever part Solomon may have had in putting it into its present form or shape, the sentiments and petitions were those of David. And with much probability it may be conjectured and the statement at the close of the Psalm confirms this, (“ The prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended ”) that he was then on his deathbed, and occupied in his thoughts with the future reign of Solomon, his son, and the incomparably more glorious reign of his greater Son and Divine Lord.

At any rate, there can be no doubt as to the ultimate meaning of the Psalm. It is one that is eminently Messianic; I mean, referring to Jesus Christ, the Messiah. There may be a few expressions in the

commencement of it which can bear application to Solomon, or the government of any earthly kingdom, and which might be advocated as terminating in him. But taking the whole Psalm together, it seems to be a prophetic delineation of the surpassing greatness and glory of the Messiah, and also of his kingdom, and government and work, the elevated inspiration of a soul thoroughly in union with the purposes of God as to the triumphant progress and the perpetuity of the Church of Christ. Splendid and imposing as Jerusalem, the city of the great king became during the reign of Solomon ; great and decisive as were the victories with which his arms were crowned ; extensive and enriching as were the conquests which he made, and largely as the nation flourished in all the arts of peace during the greater part of his reign, after the days of battle were over ; the language of the Psalm would be nothing but exaggerated and out of place, when understood to apply to anything of worldly grandeur or fame, anything merely human, which had ever appeared upon the earth. As we begin, and proceed with the reading of the Psalm, our thoughts are irresistibly drawn to Him to whom all the law and the prophets bear witness, even the branch from the stem of Jesse, growing out of his place to build the temple of the Lord, the King reigning in righteousness, coming to judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth, of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end ; and then, when we read that his subjects shall be as the grass upon the ground for multitude, that all the nations shall be blessed in Him, and come to the concluding

words, "Blessed be his glorious name forever, and let the whole earth be filled with his glory, amen, and amen." All doubt is dispelled from our minds, and we are constrained to say, Here, without any question is the Son of God, Emmanuel, the mighty Deliverer of our fallen race, the Destroyer of the great destroyer, He who was to repair the ruins of the fall, and cause righteousness and truth to pervade and cover the earth, before whom every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord.

Though He of whom this is spoken is Lord of all, He is not an inaccessible king. He enlarges his kingdom, and subdues subjects to Himself by his own personal call, the call of his Word and Spirit. And if we have been brought into his kingdom, if it is ours to glory in Jesus' name above every other, if we regard it as the highest honour of our life to belong to Him, and to have been made partakers of his salvation, we will rejoice in every opportunity given to us to celebrate his praise, to acknowledge our obligations to Him supremely, for all that hath gladdened our hearts in time, and imparted the certain hope of immortality and glory beyond the grave, and to do what we can to honour and extol and commend Him to all around us. We do so, when in a right spirit we wait upon Him in the ordinary means of grace ; we do so in the most effective manner, when in all the relations of life, both public and private, we so act in conformity with his law as to lift up a banner for his truth, and bear testimony to Him as our Lord and Ruler before our fellowmen.

Let us then, in the strength of divine grace, and in

dependence on the divine blessing, seek to contemplate the excellence and glory of the great Redeemer, and the grounds on which He is entitled to the transcendent fame which the whole of this Psalm, and our text especially, ascribes to Him, "His name shall endure forever," etc.

In addressing you from this passage and opening up the subject of it, we shall consider (1) His fame : the sources of it, or what it rests upon ; (2) The perpetuity of His fame, and (3) The results of His glorious reign.

I. Our notice is first directed to the fame or renown of Christ : "His name shall endure forever." The name cannot be dissociated from the person. When the name is mentioned or made known, it recalls the person designated, and by consequence everything about him that is fitted to attract attention and procure for him esteem. "O Lord, according to thy name, so is thy praise throughout all the earth," *i.e.*, according as the character and attributes and works of God are published abroad in the world, according as people come to know and apprehend aright, God and the things of God, so will He be praised and honoured.

Now, one who acquires fame does so because of some great achievements by which he has been distinguished, or because of the excellence of his character, or of some special qualities or dispositions about him, marking him out from the generality of mankind. Solomon was renowned for his wisdom. Homer's fame rests upon his poetic genius. Alexander the Great, Cæsar and Napoleon are celebrated as military commanders, and because of the conquests which they

made. Paul attained the pre-eminent place which he occupies in the history of the world, from his being honoured to unfold the doctrines of salvation, and to set them forth for the guidance of the Church in all future ages, and by his self-denying, labourious efforts to build up the Church of Christ among the nations of the earth.

But what are the greatest conquerors, or philosophers, or statesmen, or the highest benefactors of mankind in material things, whom the world ever saw, compared with Christ? Just as the most brilliant stars disappear in the heavens, as the sun rises, and appears in his meridian splendour, so do all the most renowned on earth fade into nothingness in the presence of Christ.

On what, then, does his fame rest? Why is it that his name will endure, and be continued as long as the sun?

I. It rests upon his glorious and divine character. The work of mediation between God and man required Divinity in Him who undertook it. For who knows God and can mediate for God but God? Who but one who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in all divine attributes, could make adequate atonement and satisfaction to the justice of the Most High for his violated law? Godhead is as essential as humanity to the God-man, the daysman, to lay his hand upon both, and so make up the peace. Hence you read,—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” “He thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” “He is God over all, blessed for ever.” “His name shall be called

Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace." He is the Creator of the universe, and as such receives the homage of all holy and intelligent beings. Creation is essentially God's. But on this we need not enlarge. Did we, with the Unitarians, believe that Christ is only a created being, however high, we are chargeable with profanity in worshipping Him ; we have no gospel, we have no hope as sinners. But, blessed be God, we have no such faith. He is Emmanuel, "God and man in two distinct natures and one person."

2. The fame of Jesus rests upon his work of humiliation, and obedience, and sufferings and death for his people. That the eternal Word, the Son of God, should become flesh and dwell among men, that He should put Himself in the room of guilty creatures—rebels against his authority and laws—undertaking to do for them what they could never have done for themselves, and to endure for them all that they were bound to endure in order to procure salvation ; this is the most wonderful of all mysteries. Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. Into this fact the angels desire to look, as unable to comprehend it. And we, of course, can only say, the love displayed therein passeth our knowledge. Yet, had it not been displayed, salvation, so far as we know from the sacred volume, would have been impossible to any sinner of the human race. Had He not gone along with the counsels of eternity, and carried out to the full the determination which He had formed, "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart," what but everlasting banishment

from the divine presence awaited the whole human family?

But he shrunk not from his work in any respect, or from the terrible conflict with the wicked one. He obeyed the law not for Himself, but that He might be able to present a perfect righteousness which shall be unto all and upon all them that believe. The Messiah died for sins, but not his own. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised," etc.

It is this work of humiliation, and obedience, and death, which is the source of all the hopes of a well-founded character which you cherish of everlasting life and blessedness in heaven. It is to this that as believers you are indebted for the felt sense of pardon and peace and reconciliation with God, and all the benefits of salvation. It is this which you propose to remember, I trust with true hearts, and with full assurance of faith, at the table of the Lord. It is this which hath gathered multitudes to Him, saying in truth, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross," etc. It is this, wherever it is proclaimed and believed, which makes the earth resound with the praises of Emmanuel ; and it is this which will fill the mansions of heaven with the unceasing song of victory and triumph, "Worthy is the Lamb which was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom," etc.

3. The fame of Jesus Christ is derived also from his glorious resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand, as Head of his Church, and Head over all things to the Church. He laid down his life that He might take it again. He died and was laid in the sepulchre with a great stone rolled on its mouth and

sealed, but it was not possible that He could be holden of death. He had rendered perfect obedience to the law. He had baffled all the power and cunning of Satan so that he could say, "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me." He had met the last enemy on his own ground, going down to the caverns of the tomb; and now nothing remained but that He should as the mighty Conqueror burst the fetters of the grave, and in the fact of his resurrection give the assurance that his work is a finished work, that by one offering up of Himself He hath forever perfected them that are sanctified.

He hath thus assured all his believing people of their resurrection in due time from the power of the grave, the body as well as the soul redeemed. He hath promised them with a similar assurance, that they also shall at length follow Him to be where He now is, in the fact that He appears as their forerunner in heaven. And consequently the Holy Ghost hath thus recorded his fame, and the ground of it which we have already mentioned: "He humbled Himself and became obedient wherefore, also God hath highly exalted Him," etc.

On these grounds, then, his glorious and divine person and character, his wondrous work of redemption for his people, being made a curse for them, and then his exaltation to his mediatorial throne as universal Lord for the interests of his Church—on these grounds does the renown of Jesus rest. In every heart that has experienced the benefits of his salvation, He reigns supreme. He is the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely. Praise waiteth for Him

continually in Zion, in his ransomed Church, wherever any are found doing his will and working his work. Even the consciences of the ungodly stand in awe of the despised Nazarene. Infidels have in their last moments prayed to Him for mercy. And as one generation after another passes away, and the songs of the redeemed are heard more extensively throughout all the tribes of the earth, so is the fame of Jesus more loudly celebrated, and his brow encircled with more numerous crowns, as trophies of his surpassing and sovereign and victorious grace.

II.—We come now in the second place to notice the perpetuity of the fame of Christ: "His name shall endure," etc. Whatever is fleeting and uncertain is comparatively of little worth. Permanence and increase give value to anything which we possess. The meteor may flash brightly through the sky, and then disappear in a moment. But the fixed star remains brilliant as before. So earthly fame is often unstable as the wind. How often amongst men is the renown of one eclipsed by the superior power or skill or talents of another! How frequently does it happen that the idol of a nation to-day, may soon be almost forgotten or little heeded! But the name of Jesus has never faded in its renown. On the contrary, just as before his appearance on the earth, the expectation of his coming only grew in ardour and intensity, as the fulness of the times approached, so since He came as the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, his kingdom has been advancing, and his fame has gone on increasing, overshadowing all else, and commanding the homage of tribes

and nations "from the river unto the ends of the earth."

1. I observe that the continuance of his name or renown is matter of promise in that Word which abideth forever. For example when the Father is represented as saying, "I have laid help on one that is mighty, I have exalted one chosen out of the people," and when He had gladly undertaken the commission, the assurance is given, "I will make Him my first-born, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven." So also by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, He shall see his seed, He shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands." And again it is promised of Him, "My servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high."

2. We argue for the perpetuity of the name of Christ from the fact, that it hath kept its place, though assailed by the strongest opposition of wicked men, and of all the powers of hell; that so far from losing its lustre, it has been more and more honoured, and his kingdom hath gone on extending itself from one period to another. From the time when after the fall of our first parents, God said to the old serpent, the devil, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed," it has been found true both in the Old and New Testament economy, that "he who was born after the flesh persecuted Him

who was born after the Spirit." When Christ appeared upon the earth, He came unto his own, and his own received Him not. Not only did Herod seek to slay Him in his infancy, not only did Satan come forth with all his power and malice against Him, as He entered on his public ministry, but the Jews, who ought to have been the builders reviled and persecuted and put Him to death, imagining that they had crushed out his name forever as an impostor and deceiver.

But the stone which the builders rejected, became the headstone of the corner. In his resurrection and ascension He proved how vain and impotent was their malice. His Gospel proved mighty to the pulling down of strongholds. His kingdom hath gone on from age to age, sometimes bitterly opposed, and torn, and cast down, as it were in the dust, as if it would speedily be extinguished, yet rising out of the ashes of the fire as glorious as ever, only to carry on and extend its conquests to the increase of the fame and glory of Messiah.

This, you know, has been the history of the Church of Christ down to the present time. To many He hath been "as a root out of a dry ground, having no form or comeliness, and no beauty wherefore they should desire Him." Many have fallen upon this stone, and been broken, and upon many it has fallen, only to grind them to powder; but the name of Jesus still rises in renown. And if there is anything that ought to stir the Church of Christ (by this I mean his believing people everywhere), if there is anything which ought to stimulate our zeal and fervour in behalf of

the kingdom and cause of Christ in subserviency to the grand motive, the constraining influence of the love of Christ, it is the rapidity with which the gospel is spreading, and taking effect in the great centres of heathenism and in the islands of the sea—the fact that whilst Satan is busy sowing the seeds of infidelity and error in professedly Christian lands, stirred up to all the greater activity, because he knows that his time is short, yet the truth as it is in Jesus is showing itself to be mighty to undermine the hoary systems of idolatry and to convert the rudest savage into the meek and humble follower of Christ, and thus to give an earnest of the speedy coming of the time when the Messiah shall have his kingdom from the rising to the setting sun. The kings and rulers of the earth have taken counsel together against the Lord and his anointed, saying, “Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us.” “He that sitteth,” etc. “Yet have I set Him king upon his holy hill of Zion.” And then the certain, infallible promise is added, “Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen,” etc.

3. We argue for the perpetuity of the name of Christ, and for the continuance and increase of his fame, from the means which He hath left and put in operation for the advancement of his cause and kingdom on the earth. The weapons of his warfare are not carnal, but spiritual. The battle of earthly warriors is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood. In this way they generally achieve their conquests. But the government of Christ is first in the hearts and consciences of men, and then over all

their affairs—all that pertains to them. And the sword which He employs for this end is his own truth—the Word wielded by the omnipotence of the Holy Ghost. Physical force can never overbear the conscience, or command the will of man. You may compel an individual to do certain acts, or to go through some outward process or piece of work ; but you cannot by any external power bring the will and the moral faculties into subjection. That can only be by the persuasive, quickening, sanctifying influence of the truth in the hands of the Spirit of God, enlightening the understanding, renewing the will, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. You know how the doctrine of Christ crucified, as soon as it was proclaimed by the apostles after the ascension of Christ, and when the promise of the Father had been fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, reached the hearts of thousands on the day of Pentecost, and as carried into both Jewish and heathen communities, was effectual to overcome the most rebellious and depraved and sunk in barbarism, making them new creatures in Jesus Christ, and thus partakers of all the precious benefits which it was designed to convey to those who embraced it. The Word is still the same, as efficacious as ever, when carried by divine power into the heart. For saith the Lord by the mouth of his prophet, "As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth, it shall

not return unto me void ; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The Word of Truth, as administered by his servants is noticed in another passage, as identified with, and in fact constituting the grand means for the salvation of the souls of men. "Whosoever," says the apostle, "shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things."

This is God's plan for the renovation of our fallen world. "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : but the Word of the Lord endureth forever." So the continuance of the Word or Gospel of Christ as the weapon by which the kingdom of Christ is to be advanced, shall certainly secure the stability and permanence of the Redeemer's fame. "The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." And accordingly, wherever the Gospel is published, and the Cross of Christ is lifted up, *there* we may say, an ensign is presented around which the tribes of earth shall gather, and thus the grand and glorious consummation will be attained, when "men shall be blessed" in Jesus, "and all nations shall call Him blessed."

III.—This is the third part of our subject: The results of Christ's reign.

1. "Men shall be blessed in Him." This has been, and will be wherever the Gospel is known and received. It is the necessary consequence of the saving knowledge of Jesus' name. You may, by the progress of civilization and the arts, communicate material benefits to those who have hitherto been destitute of them; but whatever improvement there may be in the temporal condition of any man, or community of men, they are left, if destitute of the Gospel of Christ, still strangers to everything which can impart light to the darkened mind, or peace to the troubled conscience. When the Gospel comes into a man's heart with quickening, regenerating, and sanctifying power, it brings him as it were into a new world. Not only does he see all things in a different light, but he has got into his possession a treasure, full of the substantial elements of happiness, which he would not exchange for all that the world contains, if he had it. Whatever is precious and excellent comes into a man's heart as soon as the Gospel comes—pardon, reconciliation with God, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, grace and strength according to his day, comfort and support in the day of trouble, resignation to the divine will at times, triumph over the last enemy, and glory inconceivable in the end. "Men shall be blessed in Him." This refers to the blessings which come to every believing soul in every place, and at any time. And for what purpose are these blessings bestowed upon any? Is it that they may rest in self-complacency and satisfaction with them? Certainly not. Is it not that they may long and pray, and labour, and give, that the same bless-

ings may be conveyed to all to whom they may have access, and even to the ends of the earth?

2. It is added, "All nations shall call Him blessed." This refers to the willing subjugation of all to his sway, as most benign, and just, and full of mercy. "All power," He said before his ascension, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." And "He must reign till all his enemies are made his footstool." Messiah shall be king over all the earth: "In that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one."

We cannot, my friends, attempt anything like a probable description of what will be the state of our long sin-diseased and groaning world, when the influence of "Him whose name shall endure forever" is thus to extend far and wide among the empires of the world. Is there anything beautiful in light? Light is chosen as an emblem of that period. Is there anything beautiful in fertility and power? Fertility and power are chosen emblems of that period. Is there anything beautiful in order and harmony and peace? Order and harmony and peace are mentioned as the emblems of that time. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed, their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord." Men "shall beat their

swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; they shall hang their trumpets in the hall, and learn the art of war no more." The light of the moon is to be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun is to be sevenfold. Man is to be the child of God, and God is to be the protector of man. Then shall the cry ascend as the sound of many waters, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ."

1. Our first remark from this important subject is that it becometh you so to contemplate the wondrous name and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, as that you may be constrained to realize and act in accordance with his claims upon you. Think of Him first as dwelling in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, equal and eternal and omnipotent as Himself. You see Him in Bethlehem, a little babe in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. You see Him in the garden agonized and distressed, as bearing the load of his people's guilt, till his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground. You see Him next at Calvary, stretched on the cross between two thieves exclaiming, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" And now you see Him as the Lord of glory, swaying the sceptre of universal sovereignty, and addressing to you the same invitation as He did to the people by the shores of the Sea of Galilee, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And what then is the call to you, but to fall prostrate at his feet, whilst you exclaim, "My Lord and my God."

2. He taught the necessity of being found in Him, having a personal, saving interest in those objects for which the Saviour died, and rose and revived. What matters it if Christ is the subject and the source of knowledge to others, if He is not so to you? What matters it that He is the source of repentance to others, if you possess not that repentance yourselves? Pardon? Freedom? Peace? Salvation? Are any of you to remain ignorant, hardened, guilty, enslaved, lost? Let me seriously ask you, are you content to leave this sanctuary without having part or lot in the salvation and glory and fame of Christ? If his voice does not say to you on the day of redemption, "Come ye blessed of my Father," it will certainly tell you "Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire." There are the two states, no neutral one. "Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you," etc.

3. Do you who are true believers cultivate a growing attachment to the great Redeemer. Let your love to Him be written out in legible characters—you know what I mean—in the characters of a highly devoted, self-denying and spiritual life. Be faithful to your principles; love Him because He first loved you, because of what He is in Himself and what He hath done for you; avow your love, if it be needful, at the cost of all that is dear, even life itself. You have no doubt read within the last few weeks of the terrible massacre at Isandula in South Africa, when almost a whole regiment with a large number of native troops were overpowered by multitudes of Zulus, and cut down without mercy and in savage barbarity. Some

of you may have read too, that among the bodies of the slain was found that of the young officer whose duty it was to carry and preserve the colours of his regiment. And in what condition was it found? It was discovered with the flag which he had sworn to defend, wrapped around his body, as if in the prospect of what he saw coming to himself and his companions in arms, he was resolved that these colours should not be taken from him but in death. Even the most indifferent cannot but be filled with admiration of such heroism and courageous bearing, such fidelity and devotedness to the honour of his sovereign and country. Blessed be God, there have been those in every age who have thus borne up and maintained the banner of Christ, and have perished rather than part with it. Oh! how does this put to shame the pusillanimous conduct of many, who will allow their profession, their flag, to be blotted and marred, and rent, by daily inconsistencies, who will allow their colours to droop and fall from their hands before the temptations of sin and self, and the world. And yet what is the honour of any sovereign, or any country, compared with Jerusalem, the city of the great King, and the honour of the King himself?

My young friends, here is an object worthy of your noblest ambition, to be on the side of Christ, to maintain the fame and honour of Him who is the highest in heaven. Make that your constant aim in the strength of the Spirit of God. Think it not enough to sing "I'm not ashamed to own my Lord," but let it be manifest day by day.

And to all I say, in conclusion, seek to be in Christ.

Let that be your glory. Scorn to be ashamed of Him or his cause. Be resolved his grace to make mention of his righteousness, and of that only, and to do what you can that through your instrumentality his name may be honoured and his cause promoted. "For his name shall endure forever," etc. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life."

